WORD
EATER
106
Michael Fletcher

# WORDEATER - 106


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## Sunrise.

*Regan Bielby*

The shadowy silhouette
of his muscled torso
moves across the room
like a fine-tuned machine,
each muscle reacting
to the movement of the last.

He bends to the clothes
strewn onto the floor
in a fit of anticipation
like the child unwrapping a gift
on Christmas morning.

His cloud-covered boxers
are slowly hidden
by his Levis jeans
and his chest is swallowed up
by his solid black t-shirt.

Shoes in hand,
he returns
for a sleep-eyed kiss good morning.
His dark chestnut hair skims my cheek.

Bitter-sweet kiss ended,
he moves to the door
like the tired school boy
trudging into the snow.

I soon drift unconscious
but quickly awake
to the much too hot sun
burning my face.

---

## firefly

*Regan Bielby*

Once when I was very small
I thought I really wanted
to catch fire-flies.
Until I put one in a jar
and watched it sit
so sadly lonely
it died.

Not so long ago
I thought I really wanted
to try to catch my dreams.
Until later on
I tumbled and they
slipped quick from my hands
I watched them
shatter.

## heartbeats
*Ken Biggs*

Placid silence
treads the heavens
in the fragile footfalls
of a morning's slippery dew.
your face seen in the rivulets
as the tide of yesterdays
descend in drops
one by one,
gathering
in a pool of jewels
reflecting your luster
throughout my beating breast.
for
there have been times
when I have felt your love
so deeply,
the waters of my spirit
became a stilled mirror
reflecting the smile of your voice
as it echoed against
the baffled cavern walls of my soul,
and all of me
cascaded around you
forevermore . . .
~~

## Abandoned
*Ken Biggs*

When a virgin
you couldn't keep
hands nor lips from me
Holding me gently
as I quenched and pleased
with all I held.

~

Now having served you,
I lie here
crumpled and spent,
cast and abandoned.
Treated as trash,
soon to be ash.

* reflections of a paper cup

## Voices
*Ken Biggs*

am I not my dreams unexpressed. . .
or the fears huddling in a corner of
my soul,
. . .a child among children
a hope amid chaos?
~

## Ambush
*Ken Biggs*

thunder plundered
slashing a distant arena
. . . we stalked the darkness
in a coiled arc of doom,
waiting

smothering inky silence
dampened only
by a gnawing buzz
which noshed upon our flesh,
greedily

punctuating the secrecy
eyes useless as rocks
quarrel with irritable ears
the nerves taut and barbed,
vilely

rest, metered and fitful
in this theater of death
cleaving its veil
to the applause of heartbeats
and icy-sweated breath . . .
~~

## A Dose of Mercy
*Sally Biggs*

Jello, orange, lime, strawberry, raspberry, lemon, banana, cherry, pineapple, and grape. Molded, whipped, or fruit filled, this multicolored fruity dessert was my Aunt Mary's specialty. Her face would beam with pride as she placed her latest jeweled creation on the marred wooden kitchen table for guests. My brother and I devoured the jiggle-wiggle mounds with spoons clinking and tinkling against dessert dishes. We thought jello fun to eat, because very little swallowing was required. Just pop in a spoonful and let it glide and slide all the way down. Our favorite was strawberry with peaks and swirls of whipped cream.

Aunt Mary loved making jello; she even had a special cook book, "Joys of Jello", that she used for recipes. No matter what the occasion, Aunt Mary invariably brought one of her jello molds. Our family made speculations on just what new concoction she would be arriving with.

Aunt Mary and Uncle Tim were childless, but seemed to enjoy the company of other people's children. I was allowed to spend a great deal of time with them. When I was seven, our family moved to a home that was one street over from where they lived. The walk to school took me past their house, and I would stop to visit them each morning and afternoon. Aunt Mary always had a treat for my lunch and a snack for after school. On frigid winter days their house was a haven where I could warm myself. Hot tea or chocolate would be steaming and ready, but I think Aunt Mary's hugs were what drove the cold away. My aunt and uncle loved me as if I were their own child, and my parents were more than happy to share their daughter.

I am twenty now, and memories are exploding in my head like firecrackers gone wild. I look down at Aunt Mary on her hospital bed, wishing I had not come. Her face is like a chalkboard wiped clean of worldly cares. The room takes on the feel of a roller coaster on a downward plunge into empty space. I latch onto the bed railing to ward off shock. Why did she choose me as her confessor? Her transgression should have been confided to a priest for absolution, and not to me.

The words she had spoken couldn't be true; maybe her mind had taken flight before her last breath, confession being delusion. Aunt Mary committing such an act was as unlikely as winter following spring. Reality began to seep into my distraught mind as I leaned forward to kiss her one last time, and pressed the call button. A nurse arrived in white flurry, gauging the situation in seconds. She assured me that my presence was no longer necessary, that everything would be taken care of.

Grief spilled from my eyes on the drive home, blinding my vision. How could the earth still be spinning without Aunt Mary? Since Uncle Tim had died several years earlier, it would be my duty to make the necessary phone calls to family. I still pondered whether medication could have caused hallucination. Pain from cancer had intensified in the last few days, and one of the nurses informed us that a higher dosage was being administered to keep her comfortable.

I began to contemplate what Aunt Mary had told me while it was still clear in my mind. The confession had involved one of the residents at the nursing home where Mary had worked after Uncle Tim's death. Recalling that time in her life, I knew that Uncle Tim hadn't had life insurance, and she had been forced to find work. She had a friend that worked in a nursing home, who assisted her in finding a position as a nurse's aide. Aunt Mary had seemed excited about the prospect of her new job. Life had become empty without my uncle, and the "job would help alleviate some of the loneliness" she had told everyone.

I'd usually visit with my aunt at least twice a week, but spoke to her by phone on a daily basis to make sure she was all right. Her job had been a frequent topic in our conversations; now I tried to recall as many as I could. Hopefully, they would provide insight to her confession.

Some of the residents, she told me, seemed happy, especially the ones who had regressed to a childlike state, which she considered a blessing. She talked about those who were sedated most of the time and sat staring out of blank faces. The ones that disturbed her most were those restrained to beds or wheel chairs, tied like prisoners with no chance of escape. She hated to see people so stripped of dignity. And there were the bedridden ones suffering with medical ailments that would never heal. Aunt Mary was a compassionate person, and I knew that her job caused her to be depressed and anxious. She worried about those elderly people even when she wasn't working, never seeming to be able to put them out of her mind. She told family members that if she ever reached a point when she could no longer care for herself she would prefer that we just shoot her. Never should she be placed in any kind of nursing facility.

Aunt Mary would occasionally tell stories about the residents. There was the account of the lady who liked to take dentures that were not her own. She would wander into rooms that were unoccupied by their owners gathering up quite a collection, which were then hidden for safekeeping. Staff were stumped trying to fig-

ure out who the culprit was. The stockpile was discovered wadded up in the dirty clothes bin.

Another was about a gentleman who would look for his deceased wife during the night. Thinking he had found her, he would climb into bed with some unsuspecting female. There would be loud screams echoing down the hall. Unfortunately, this happened so often the man had to be restrained at night. Aunt Mary said he and his wife had been married for sixty-five years, and he would cry for her daily, not remembering that she had died three years earlier.

One resident had to be moved to another room after she tired of her roommate's snoring and hit her over the head with a cane. Aunt Mary usually had a new collection of stories to share whenever we got together for a visit. The telling of those stories was one of the ways that helped her cope with the sad sights she witnessed each day. She was happy about one aspect of her job, which was the special task of feeding those who were too frail and ill to perform that function for themselves. She said it reminded her of the feeding of baby birds. Some of her charges were stroke victims, and she would have to remind them to swallow with each spoonful of food. Most had to be fed a pureed diet, for they had problems with chewing and digesting. Aunt Mary said it was a long painstaking process, but she enjoyed the special care she could provide.

I picked her up from work one day and didn't find the nursing home to be a very pleasant place. The first thing I noticed upon entering the building was the smell of disinfectant, the sharp acrid odor seemed to bite at my nose and did little to disguise the underlying reek of urine. The cheerful design of the interior opposed the humanity who lived there. Most of the elderly residents looked melancholy, with shriveled bodies that looked like most of their moisture had been drained and sucked out by some unknown force. I found it almost impossible to imagine them as they must have looked in the youthful stage of their lives. I never volunteered to pick up Aunt Mary again. I asked her how she could work there, and she explained that some people had to be caretakers or most of these elderly people would have no one to look after them. Not all families were equipped emotionally or physically to care for loved ones, so nursing homes became the alternative.

Aunt Mary worked at the nursing home for about three years, speaking of her job less and less. Family and friends thought her work was beginning to have a negative effect, as they observed her become morose and withdrawn. I had tried to talk to her about the family's concern, but she just said that she was worried about one of the residents she was fond of. No further explanations were offered.

Dredging up these memories didn't accomplish much in providing the answer I was seeking. Aunt Mary's confession was not detailed. She said that she had rendered an overdose of sleeping pills to one of her charges who had pleaded and begged for her help to bring a painful existence to an end. Aunt Mary said that she wasn't sorry for what she had done, because it would have been sinful to ignore the suffering of a beloved friend.

Today is the day for final good-byes to Aunt Mary. I never realized how many friends she had until now. The funeral home is filled to overflowing with people coming to pay last respects. One lady approaches and says that I must be the niece my aunt always talked about. She explains that Aunt Mary took care of her mother at the nursing home and what a won-

derful person she was. Her mother at age ninety was totally bedridden and required gentle handling because her body was so fragile and wracked with pain. Aunt Mary had done her best to effectively meet those special needs. She was even kind enough to bring jello prepared at home because the variety served at the nursing home was so rubbery mother could not eat it.

"She was so grateful for the loving attention you aunt bestowed." My mind began to wander as this dear lady prattled on about how her mother had become weary of life. "The nursing home staff had said mother was cheerful that evening before she died, because your aunt had brought her raspberry jello, which was her favorite. Your aunt helped her eat her evening meal, and then saw to her needs for the night. They called early the next morning to inform me that mother had expired sometime during the night in her sleep. I never got to thank your aunt for the loving care she gave mother. I called the nursing home asking for her, but was told she resigned the day after mother's death."

## Christmas Wish List

*Sally Biggs*

The house was still as the family slept. The only sound came from the furnace and the occasional hum of the refrigerator. Outside snow fell and the wind gently blew small mounds that spread to cover the ground in a shroud of white. The family would wake to a world sporting winter apparel. Rabbits hopped about welcoming the snow, making trails of paw prints that were quickly covered over. Morning would arrive soon, time for the bunnies to disappear to their dwellings where they too would sleep.

Tim, the eight year old, awoke first to discover the changes that had taken place during the night. He loved snow and loudly woke the rest of the family to "come look." It wasn't long before his parents and little sister were all staring out windows to share his discovery. Tim was glad it was Saturday and not a school day. He wanted to put on his snow clothes and rush outside but knew mom would insist on breakfast first.

"Tim, go get dressed, make your bed, and I'll hurry to make breakfast so that you and your sister can go out to play" said mom.

No prompting was needed; he raced to his room, dressed as quickly as he could, made his bed in a haphazard way, and then went to help sister Sarah. She was four and hadn't learned the tricks of dressing in a hurry, so he thought he'd help speed her along. Sarah was still in her nightgown. All she had managed were her socks. She was sweet and he really liked her, but girls sure could be slow when it came to dressing. Tim rummaged through her dresser, finding warm clothing and patiently helped her. Finally she was ready. Off they went to have breakfast.

Tim got the sled from the garage, and he and Sarah went to the back yard. Their yard was perfect for sledding as it pitched down all the way to the edge of the property. The lot was long and provided a good run. There were some trees to avoid, but otherwise it was a straight shot to the bottom. If the snow were just right, not wet and mushy, there was no stopping until the bottom of the hill was reached. Sometimes it almost felt like you were flying as the

sled sliced through the air. Trudging back up the hill pulling the sled wasn't quite as much fun, but well worth the effort. Sarah only lasted for one trip down and by the time they got back to the house she was ready to go inside. Then Tim felt free, and could do some serious sledding. He felt lucky to have such a huge yard to play in. None of his friends had anything nearly as big. He wished his dad weren't working today and could be here with him. Dad could really get the sled to fly down the hill. Sometimes they would do some night sledding, and that was fun because everything looked so different in the dark. And when the moon was out the ground and trees would sparkle, and it would be as light as day. Tim was having a wonderful time, but his fingers began to feel like they weren't there anymore and his nose kept running from the cold; so he thought he better go in before he turned into an icicle.

The house felt nice and warm, but his fingers and feet began to burn as he thawed out and his hands were red. His mom ran some warm water in the kitchen sink and had him put his hands in it. Within a few minutes he felt warmth seeping back into his hands and they began to tingle and were no longer numb. There was hot chocolate with little marshmallows floating on top waiting for him, which he tried to gulp down without burning his tongue. Sure did taste good. Mom always made the best hot chocolate.

"Tim, I'd like to straighten up your room and finish any homework you have," said mom. "We'll be going to the mall tomorrow to do some Christmas shopping, so now would be a good time to get it done."

There wasn't much work to cleaning his room. He put the few dirty clothes he had in the hamper and picked up some items he had left lying on the floor and went to get the vacuum. He had a race with himself to see how fast he could finish the job. Done, and in record time too. During his clean up he had been thinking about Christmas. He thought it was the best of all the holidays and just thinking about it filled him with a tingly excited feeling that went all the way to the tips of his toes. Christmas meant so many things. There was the Christmas party at school with a gift exchange, and two whole weeks off for the Christmas holidays. They were already practicing at church for their annual program, and he had a good part this year. Mom would be baking huge batches of cookies, and he and Sarah would get to help decorate them. Next weekend they would be getting the Christmas tree, and decorating was always fun. He loved the twinkling lights and the way the ornaments glittered and sparkled. When he grew up, he planned on having the largest tree he could find and keeping it up even after Christmas. He always felt sad when it came time to take the tree down and put all the beautiful ornaments back in their boxes for next year. The living room would lose its colorful magic and look so bare without the tree standing there in the corner. Maybe that's why everything was so special. If there were a Christmas tree standing around all year, it wouldn't be that wonderful anymore he thought. Christmas morning would arrive, and there would be piles of gifts under the tree. He always liked to sneak down the hall for a quick peek before anyone was up.

Saturday nights at the Scanlins was popcorn night. Dad would bring videos home, and the whole family would watch movies and eat popcorn. It was a family night and Tim's favorite. Dad worked long hours and never got to just sit and be with his family except Saturday and Sunday nights. Tim always felt happy when dad could be with them. He loved his deep

laugh and admired how he could eat popcorn. There was never a single kernel left when dad was around. His big strong hands would just keep going in and out of the bowl like radar. Sometimes Tim would try and trick him by sneaking a piece of candy into the bowl to see if dad would even notice. Most of the time he didn't, and then the rest of the family would laugh themselves silly. Yes, things were always so much more fun when dad was around.

The house was silent once again and most of the family was asleep, but not Tim. He was awake in his bed, still thinking about Christmas. He had only one item on his list this year, and it was a train. This he wanted more than anything else in the world, and that's why he hadn't even bothered to write anything else down on his wish list. He knew it was a pretty big request, but it sure would make him happy. Tim had loved trains for as long as he could remember.

At night he could hear the trains whistles blowing and never tired of hearing them. He could feel the vibrations of the train speeding along, even though the tracks were several miles away. He thought how powerful trains were if they could shake the ground so hard. When he couldn't sleep, he would imagine himself on a train riding through the night on a long journey. The steady click-clacking hum of the train's wheels on the tracks would lull him to sleep. He had been wanting a train for a few years now, and he sure hoped this would be the year he got one. When he grew up, he had plans to be an engineer and travel all over the country.

He had already said his prayers for the night and knew you weren't supposed to pray for selfish things, but he couldn't help himself. He figured God knew all his thoughts anyway so an extra hint couldn't hurt, and if it was sinful to pray for a train, God did forgive sins didn't he? His eyes began to close and he fell asleep to dream of shiny, silver trains with himself as the engineer sitting high, controlling the throttles, and tooting the train's whistle.

After church the whole family went to the mall. Tim had saved his allowance so he could buy gifts for his family. Dad decided Walgreens would be just the place for Tim to do his shopping. Sarah and mom went off to do their shopping in another direction. Dad stayed close by but told Tim he was old enough to take charge of his own shopping this year. Tim selected some lavender bath salts for his mom that were in a pretty crystal bottle, a new game for Sarah, and set of three different kinds of nuts for dad. He hoped he had enough money to pay for everything, and was almost sure he would, unless the taxes added too much. Dad let him pay for everything himself, and Tim breathed a sigh of relief as the lady at the checkout gave him a dollar and a quarter in change. Now his shopping was done, and it hadn't taken much more than thirty minutes. He wondered why grownups made such a big deal about how hard Christmas shopping was. He thought gift buying was pretty easy. The only part that was difficult was having enough money to purchase the gifts.

"Would you like to go to the toy department at Marshall Fields?" his dad asked.

Tim's smile was the only answer needed. The toy department was crowded with energetic children and harassed-looking parents clutching bags and packages trying to keep track of their children. Tim and his dad browsed around as Tim's eyes searched for the train sets. He finally saw them and nonchalantly started moving in their direction as dad followed along. There was a display all set up with a train whizzing around the tracks, and lots of little boys

gathered around watching with longing eyes. The train was a freight and looked like the real thing. It was on a green board that looked like grass. There were tree and houses and railroad crossings with little cars waiting at crossing gates. Tim could barely take it all in, and thought it was perfect. His dad thought so too and seemed to be taking a real interest in the display. He walked around it at least three times. Maybe dad wanted a train for Christmas too. There were train sets in big boxes stacked on shelves, and they spent some time looking at those. Dad told Tim it wa time to go and meet mom and Sarah, and when they were done, everyone could go to McDonalds for lunch. Tim thought that would be a great idea. he was getting hungry and could already taste those crispy French fries.

The next two weeks found Tim on his very best behavior. He did everything his parents told him without complaint and tried to be extra helpful. He even helped mom with the stacks of baking dishes she always seemed to be making as she did the Christmas baking. He thought if he showed how good he could be, he might have a better chance for that train. Tim tried not to think about one of the lessons his parents had always taught, and that was that people don't always get what they want just because they want something. Also there were times in life that could bring disappointment.

Sarah was not even trying to be good. In fact she seemed to be awfully naughty these days. Tim tried to give her some brotherly advice about Santa's being able to see all the bad things she kept doing and instead of being grateful she bunched up her little hand into a fist and hit him as hard as she could. He decided to forgive her and not go tattling to mom. Christmas was supposed to be a time of forgiveness, and he thought he had done his part. All the Christmas excitement must be too much for Sarah. Maybe she was worried about whether she would get the new doll she had put on her list. Tim had helped her write her list, and he thought asking for a doll was dumb anyway since she had all kinds of dolls. Sometimes he just couldn't understand girls. He had tried suggesting things she didn't have, but she stubbornly refused to change her list and then burst into tears.

Thinking about Sarah made him remember that people were supposed to be extra nice to each other at Christmas. He decided to ask Sarah to play one of her favorite games. She was happy with the suggestion, and Tim felt good inside to see her smiling. She could be trouble sometimes, but he loved her very much and never liked to see her cry.

The next two weeks before Christmas were a blur of activities and time went by more quickly than he thought it would. The Christmas tree was all decorated and tonight was Christmas Eve. Mom had made eggnog and they were having popcorn even though it wasn't Saturday night. The family were all gathered in the living room as the lights on the Christmas seemed to dance in the darkened room. Everyone was smiling and in a happy mood. Dad as usual was gobbling up popcorn and telling stories about when he was a child. Sometimes to Tim's amazement he would even tell some of the bad things he had done as a child growing up. Didn't sound like dad had been a perfect angel, that's for sure. Tim knew if he committed the same crimes he would be punished. Guess he wouldn't even try the same stuff dad had done. Mom never talked much about her childhood except that times had been tough, and she and her sister had never got along very well. Tim knew there really wasn't a Santa, but he had to play along for Sarah's

benefit. Sometimes he wished he still did believe because maybe then he'd get his train. Goodnights were said and everyone went to bed. Tim had a hard time falling asleep because he was anxious for tomorrow to come. He listened for a train whistle but fell asleep long before any were to be heard.

Christmas morning found Tim tiptoeing down the hallway even though it was still dark. He wanted to look things over before the rest of the family woke. Yes, there were many gift under the tree, but no train and no large boxes. His stomach did a dive, and disappointment wrapped itself around him. Well raised child that he was, he knew he would just have to act happy with whatever was given to him and try to hide his disappointment. He silently crept back to his room with all hope and excitement gone.

A few hours later he heard his parents and Sarah calling for him to hurry and wake up. Time to start practicing a smile he didn't really feel. he wished he had one that could just be pasted on. He realized he was no longer a child, and needed to hide his feelings and not spoil the day for the rest of the family.

Sarah was happy at least. She was squealing with excitement and ripping open gifts as fast as they were handed to her. Tim's parents wished him a Merry Christmas and told him to start opening his gifts. He began to feel more cheerful because his parents had given him some very nice gifts, and he was sure to say thank you as he opened each one. Tim found the presents he had for his family and passed them out. He felt proud to be able to give gifts that he had bought with his own money. His parents were very pleased with his choices and gave him big hugs. Sarah even wrapped her arms around Tim and gave him a sloppy wet kiss. Tim noticed that his parents didn't have very many gifts to open and he hoped that he would be able to save more next year. All the gifts were unwrapped and it was time for clean up. Tim helped pick up all the empty boxes and abandoned wrapping paper wondering why his mom and dad kept glancing at each other.

"Tim would you please go get garbage bags, there are some in the basement in my workroom" said dad.

Tim ran down the stairs and hit the light switch. The light turned the darkness into blinding light, and he stopped dead in his tracks. He couldn't believe his eyes because there right before him was his dream come true. The train was resting on shiny, silver tracks waiting to round the bend. The setup was just like the one at the toy store only much better. This one even had a covered tunnel and more cars attached to the engine. And at the very end he spotted a red caboose with tiny black railings. Tim became aware there were people behind him now and turned to see his family with big smiles on their faces. Tim just kept staring at his train and then heard dad asking him if he'd like to see how it ran. He felt dad move next to him, and then his dad showed him the control panel and what each button and knob was for.

"Ok, Tim, let's see what this train can do. Go ahead and start it up."

Tim turned the switch on and watched in awe as his very own train began to make it's way around the track. Around and around it went, traveling through the make believe town. Tim carefully increased the speed and then it raced on its journey even faster, disappearing in and out of the tunnel. This was so much better than he had ever hoped for, he found it hard to believe. Sarah wanted to help run the train, so he let her have a turn, but not a very long one. Tim had the brightest smile, and this time it was a real one.

Mom gave Tim a hug and told him how happy she was that his wishes had come true. Then she took Sarah upstairs to help with breakfast.

"Dad, when did you do all this? You're always at work. We have supper and then it's time for bed, and I never saw you go to your workroom."

"I worked on it after you and Sarah went to bed. Tim, when I was your age I wanted a train too, but it never happened. Getting this train for you and creating the board has been almost as good as having my own. In fact it was so much fun your mom would have to come down every night and drag me to bed. I'm happy that you like it, and I know you'll take good care of it. There's still some more things to add to the board, but I saved them for us to work on together."

As much as Tim was thrilled with his train he was even happier with what he knew his dad had done for him. He realized more than ever just how special he was.

"Thanks, Dad, this is the very best present I've ever received, and I think you should take a turn now."

Christmas night had come, and the family enjoyed one last ritual. They bundled up and piled into the car to drive around and look at all the decorations and lights in the nearby neighborhoods. The ordinary world looked like a magical fairyland with so many lights shining everywhere. Tim looked at the houses they passed with light spilling from their windows and wondered if the people inside were as happy tonight as he was.

Another Christmas had come and gone and the family slept, each member dreaming their own special dream. Tim slept with a small smile on his lips, but tonight his dreams were not of trains.

## tasseography

*Crystal Duran*

a twisted silhouette of obscure contortioned figures...a lustful copulation with the vibrous rhythm...such beauty wasted neck to someone else...[pity]...a distant face in a close coordinate...a familiar...memory from a deja-vu dream/vision...all air tight...sealed...in a series of confused ridiculous movement and audio rape...how obvious... the nervous farce...she tries...this hurts me to look at the display of pseudo-ballet...i feel overwhelming pity for the woman with tights on...prancing about her red-faced partner amidst a crowd of gawking aristocrats...the woman with the leopard print scarf around her nappy locks and black leotard...beyond the shadows seen through bamboo doors, black tea is served on decadent porcelain cups...a man with slanted black eyes sits cross-legged on square yellow mats..."tea", he says, "provides the mind and body a cleansed outlook on life that reflects only truth and purity through burial of the past in the cemeteries of the brain"...flipping over his cup and rolling it in his palm, he tells me to read...but i forgot how to...he looks at me ...upset

## MåZåpån
## (The reincarnate of many of the AZTEC GODDESSES)

*Crystal Duran*

SIN LIKE MAZAPAN HE HAS.
SKIN LIKE DRIED SWEETENED
    CORN DUST.
WALKING IN FLOWING CLOAKS.
OVER SNOW-CAPPED MOUNTAINS.
ARIZONA
TUSCON.
HE STANDS ON MT. LEMON.
SPLASH OF SKY.
SPLASH OF CLOUD. BARE CHEST.
STUBBLE FOR HAIR. HEAD, BALD.
INCENSE SWIRLS ON MOUNTAIN.
INDIAN MEDICINE MEN
    SMOKE SAGE.
EAGLE PERCHED. POSITIONED.
BUDDHIST, HISPANIC...JORGE.
GRAY ROCK OF MOUNTAIN.
MASSIVE FOLDS
    OF ELEPHANT EARTH
PROTRUDING.
MAHOGANY BUDDHA RESTS
    ON CHEST.
LOTUS POSITION. EYES SHUT.
    INHALING
HIMSELF.
DEEP. THE RIVER FLOWS.
CHANT FOR A WHISPER. AWAKE.
    ASLEEP.
LIPS TOGETHER IN PRAYER.
    "nyo set so
    Nyo ze riki
    Nyo set kukyo to
I TASTE HIM LIKE PALM TREES.
CRUMBLES OF MAZAPAN
    IN MY PALM. YUM.
PALM TREES IN MEXICO.
    PARENTS LAND.
I SQUINT MY BROWN EYES. SUN.
    HOVERING,
INCINERATING.
KISSING FOREHEAD-MY.
THE WATER. GLASS.
    DOWNWARD FLOW.
LOTUS POSITION. CLOAK OF WHITE.
KISS THE LIPS OF THE PRAYING
    BUDDHIST.
MEDITATION=ELEVATION.
LAPSE OF TIME. FLASH OF TREES.
GREEN, MOUNTAIN-GRAY.
SKIN. HIS. AN
ABSOLUTE[GRAY-MAZAPAN-TAUPE]
SANDALWOOD SWIRLS.
    CURLS OF SMOKE.
SKY.
SAGE IS PURIFYING. PAGAN-ME.
OBSERVATION.
BEADS DANGLE ON NIPPLE.
    MINE. BROWN
RAISIN WRINKLE...MINE.
SHADES OF HISPANICS.
    CACTUS ON MY
FOREHEAD. MEXICAN-ME.
HIM ALSO. WICCA ME.
    BUDDHIST/HIM.

## Nikki
*Erica Gallagher (Alumni)*

I'm in the mood
To recall an attitude
Bought or borrowed by a girl
Named Nikki
So that isn't to say she's a bad seed
Now blooming this spring
Into a dangerous white flower...
It's to say rather that this summer
She'll be rotting apple
With sick seeds inside
In debt to her youthful perils.

## Phair
*Erica Gallagher (Alumni)*

Mother in a long face
Pouty lips and blue eye shadow.

Darling butterfly dances silently
And writes primarily about youth.

Musician Rupunzel throws down
her best chords
And prays a prince will give her airplay.

Greedless businesswoman is a crooked book
In an industry of clean leaves.

I like the thought of her being my hero
When I myself refuse to adore.

## Watching Myself
*Erica Gallagher (Alumni)*

Yesterday it was Diet Coke; $.70
Today it's Caffeine Free Diet Coke.
It's from a 24 can pack.
She's lipticking the spout
The tab is about to be history
In her story
The story of her day,
The drink she guzzles
I see the eyebrows she colors in
I notice every single detail
Blank fingernails- chewed pink
soft hands, chubby and freckled
Gold hairs reflect off of fluorescent lights.
What's up her sleeve?
What's under her shirt?
What color bra does she have on today?
I can't see her naked
She wears too many coats, pants, and shoes-
I wonder if she knows
How many hours
I have spent watching her.

## Men Don't Know
*Erica Gallagher (Alumni)*

Men don't know and they never will
What it is to be the lady
Folding a napkin daintily
Atop a dressed lap.

Men don't know and they never will
What it is to be the only

One in a land of many
Who must hold back unpleasant words.

Men don't know and they never will
What it is to be the mother
When being the mother means
Being under-appreciated.

## Math is Dead

*Erica Gallagher (Alumni)*

Descartes, dead
I'm dead in my pencil
But so close I've come today
To embrace the eraser.
Protractor, for what?
Logic, premise, reason, blood.
Can it be?
Could there be a universal link
A smile, a wink, a four is
Two two's
In every neck of the woods
I am a pirate today
Numb, but wandering the island drunk
No numbers will find my white flag
Regardless.

## A Grey Coat

*Margaret Howells*

From your sanctuary deep in the trees you glide smoothly, with such ease.

Elegant and horrifying-quite a sight; wings silent, tremendous in might.

At dusk you create a terrifying fright, resembling a pterodactyl in its fight.

Frequently camouflaged and hidden away, on slender stems which never sway,

your body is dressed in its finest array.

Blending perfectly with the shade of rock you stand, immobile, at the edge of a loch.

Appearing the color of the misty hue, which disappears as you come into view,

the mystery is solved in the light of day: you are but a heron in your coat of grey.

## One Day in Summer

*Margaret Howells*

"So, tell me how you felt when you knew you had won?"

"Obviously thrilled, really excited, but it was difficult to take it in."

"Did you think the film was going to be a success?"

"I hoped, but I had no idea it would break previous box office records."

An endless, unremitting stream of noise is-

sued from a TV. Like a verbal duel, first one voice forged ahead then was driven back on receipt of a response from the other. A listener would be able to recognize the voice, as it was that of the most popular talk show host, currently interviewing a male film star who had just won an Academy Award for best actor. The conversation was light, interspersed with occasional ripples of audience laughter.

A bed, banked with electronic monitors and all the paraphernalia which modern medicine dictated as a requirement of the patient's condition, was the dominating feature of the room. Emitting a variety of bleeps and hums, machinery recorded the current condition of the patient with numbers in the "halloween-green" shade of a liquid crystal display. Snake-like lines traversed the void between the machinery and recipient.

There was a noticeable silence. The only noises appeared to be superfluous vague additions, merely superficial, and their overall effect added even more substance to the perception of a contrived, bright atmosphere. Like the sunny yellow paintwork, the constant chatter from the TV, merry jingles, and scenes from the ads only served to deepen the depression.

The door opened and a "white coat" strode into the room. Dr. Simons was eager to cover his daily rounds as he had promised his family that he would be swift.

"So, how's my girl today?" He met the patient's eyes with a smile to cover his concern. "Lousy weather isn't it?" He continued although there were no responses to his remarks.

His examination complete, he issued instructions to the nurse, who was having a little difficulty carrying out his instructions before having to follow him on to the next patient.

"Yes, Dr. Simons," she acknowledged, rapidly completing alterations on the patient's chart.

Nurse White was short but almost as wide as she was high, with a complexion in opposition to her name. Her usual ebullient demeanor was restrained as she was huffing and puffing from the extra exertion. Her ample bosom tossed with increased rapidity as she hurried; but now, just for a moment, she stood immobile by a patient's bed. The nurse knew she should not have any favorites, but this patient needed concern.

Efficiently she checked the attachment of each lifeline, rearranged the bedcovers, and with great tenderness, lifted the patient's head to plump the pillows. Adjustments to bedcovers and pillows would, to any onlooker, appear unnecessary. After all, the patient was paralyzed, seemingly unable to move even a finger; therefore, the bedcovers were exactly as they had been when checked the previous day.

As she worked her way methodically through this routine, Nurse White spoke in low, soothing tones to her patient. Smoothing the fine blond, silky hair, she moved close and whispered, "There, now, don't you look beautiful? Your hair is gleaming like gold thread; your eyes are the palest cornflower blue, and - oh - those perfect lips. You keep on telling yourself that you're gonna walk out of here, and you surely will, darlin'!" she cooed emphatically.

Nurse White, or Ellie, as she was fondly known by her workmates, wished with all her heart that her prognosis would prove prophetic; however, all indications so far were to the contrary. Ellie had first met Suzie in August. Returning from a relaxing two weeks' vacation, Sister Jenkins updated her with the changes which had taken place while she had been away. Now with a newly-charged energy, she

listened as Sister ran through the list. There was a noticeable pause, "Room 10 - Suzie Perkins - not good. She had a climbing accident, and although she's regained consciousness, she appears paralyzed and unable to speak - yet!"

Sister Jenkins believed in the positive approach and she instilled enthusiasm in her staff. No case, however severe, was reason to believe the worst. Her stringent tutoring of this doctrine flowed like an invisible thread through each of her staff, the offshoot of which was noticeable in the speed of recovery and discharge of patients. All in all a very satisfactory state of affairs - more patients, more money for the hospital, and a better reputation, etc.

Ellie watched as Dr. Simons marched out of the room. She wanted to spend more time with Suzie but knew that it wouldn't be possible, at least until he had completed his rounds. Squeezing Suzie's hand and leaning close, Ellie whispered with a deep, throaty chuckle, "I've gotta go now - doctor's got a bug up his ass today. I'll see you later, honey." The nurse then chugged through the doorway at an ever-increasing speed, just catching sight of Dr. Simons entering another room. Turning back, she quietly closed the door, giving a last glance at Suzie to ensure she was OK.

Following the whirlwind of activity, once again it was the TV which commanded attention above the oppressive silence; the patient was once more alone in her world.

Suzie heard small bursts of voices and footsteps passing her door - of course, visiting time, she thought. Her senses were strained to every sound; the door handle slowly turned, and she was aware that someone had come into the room. She could hear the noise of shoes on the tile floor and the rustling sound of paper. She was puzzled when she sensed someone beside her bed, but as yet no head appeared over her face to greet her.

"Hi, Suzie, I'm Laquesha."

Suzie was surprised when she heard a young girl's voice and was mystified as to how this little girl knew her name?

As though in answer to her thoughts, Laquesha said, "My mom's your nurse. She said you're on your own a lot and wants me to talk to you."

"Here!" her voice held a tone of pride as she thrust a paper before Suzie's face for a moment or two, "I did this for you - do you like it?"

In the time it was in front of her, Suzie made out a brightly-colored picture of a horse.

"I go riding every week, and Fritz is my favorite pony." The picture was pulled away as quickly as it had appeared while Suzie's peripheral vision just caught sight of the top of a mop of black, curly hair. Her attention was then drawn to the girl's footsteps from which she was aware that Laquesha was walking around the bed in the direction of the window.

"Ugh," Laquesha shivered. "I hope Fritz is in his stable and not out in some field - he hates the rain. Do you like horses?"

On and on she prattled with her continuing childish discourse about anything and everything, until Suzie was wondering if the little visitor was going to stay with her for evermore. Then she heard Nurse White's distinctive voice, "Laquesha, I have not heard you stop to draw in a breath, child. I told you to talk to Suzie for just a minute, not to run on and on like a river in full flood. Now you say goodbye 'cause I'm sure that Suzie needs some rest so that she can get better."

Ellie took a closer look at her patient, as if to determine what kind of reaction the child's visit may have had. The face before her could

have been a mask from a waxworks museum.

"There now, I did not mean for Laquesha to be a nuisance, honey. I just thought you would like to hear a new voice, see a different face - after all you must be pretty bored with seeing me and Dr. Simons all the time!" Ellie soothed. "Laquesha's excited right now 'cause I'm taking her to see the new Disney film, Bright Star. It's the story of a show-jumping horse. She says that's what she wants to do when she grows up," Ellie chuckled and continued, "I'm sure she will. She's so determined in everything she sets her mind to. Well, you take care now, the night staff are coming on duty; sleep well and I'll see you in the morning."

For Suzie the transformation in the room at the loss of her visitors was instantaneous. Whereas previously the atmosphere had been vibrant, now it became dull with the repetitive patterns in place, and the TV.

I wish someone would turn off that machine. It's driving me insane! She thought irritably. I want peace and quiet, so that I can think. Another day, and I'm still here. I must have been here for quite some time. It was warm when Marnie and I came here;now there is football on the TV, and it gets dark early. Summertime - I've missed it. It always used to seem endless, so many things to do and places to go; now everything has stopped still, just like me.

I'm going to get better - I know I will. Ellie knows. She knows that I can hear her. The others are kind and gentle but they treat me as though I am deaf, or dead! I listen to Ellie. It's very hard to believe though. I see the expressions on people's faces.

Suzie's thoughts returned to that fateful Wednesday when she and her friend Marnie were midway through their week's vacation in Arizona. Strange, Suzie thought, how every detail of that day was somehow engraved on her memory. They had had a light breakfast before setting out for Ginty's Peak. Popular with rockclimbers, it was situated in a particularly scenic part of Sedona. The journey had taken no time at all; it seemed, as the girls had been absorbed discussing where they hoped to visit before it was time to fly home to Colorado.

Pulling up at the base of the rockface, both of them leaned forward to look out the windshield, "Wow!" Marnie exhaled the word, "It's incredible." The smooth red rock loomed before them, tinged by the early morning sunshine. They changed into boots; put on belts to carry essentials, and were on their way.

They followed a pathway for a short distant, mainly to appreciate the surrounding views. Marnie was captivated by the beauty of the desert. It was completely contrary to the picture the word "desert" suggested. She had not expected to see so many cactus, trees, and shrubs. Suzie was struck by the peace, which was one of the reasons why she enjoyed rockclimbing so much. Apart from the tremendous rush she got when she reached the summit, a lot of the pleasure was gained from isolation as she focused on the climbing.

Reaching what appeared to be the end of a short trail, they discussed the best route, then were finally on their way. There was a rhythm to the climb: find the best foothold, fasten the rope, and step, then repeat the sequence, slowly, ever upward. Every so often Suzie would pause to glance at the surroundings. The sun was high in the sky and a shimmering haze hung low over the desert, an indicator of the temperature below.

One minute everything was fine; the next it was grim. Suzie had been admiring the view. All she could remember was moving up for the next foothold, slipping, and hearing

Marnie's desperate shriek, "Suzie! Oh no, .....Suzie!" Just reliving that moment brought beads of perspiration to Suzie's forehead. She distinctly remembered the feeling of abject terror as she lost control; the horrible sick sensation in the pit of her stomach.

Christmas Eve in the hospital was different, Suzie realized, noting everyone's jovial mood. She too was excited, as her family was coming to town to stay a few days. Then they would return to the ranch in Colorado for her father to look after the horses. Their visits had not been easy for them. Marnie had managed to visit her every four to six weeks, and Suzie had been truly heartened to see her each time. With the onset of evening, the relaxed atmosphere became more joyful and there was a gleam in people's eyes. This was a Christmas she believed she would never forget. She told herself that there was no way she would be in the hospital this time next year. Constantly, on a daily basis, she ensured that she concentrated on the positive aspects of her situation and had a firm resolve to renew herself.

Suzie's thoughts returned to Christmases past, finding some more memorable than others because of a specific occurrence, visitor or gift. There was just one other Christmas she had been in bed: she had been very young and had a bad infection. Because she was too ill to go downstairs to see the tree, Suzie's parents and brother, Mike, had brought the presents to her room. Even now she could remember every gift she had that year and the smile on her mother's face.

Suzie woke up as she was disturbed by someone coming into her room.

"Oh, shhhh, she's sleeping," her mother whispered.

"Too late," her father said as he reached the bed and saw Suzie's eyes open. As he bent down and kissed her cheek, Suzie could smell the aftershave he had always worn. She could see tears forming in the corners of her mother's eyes. Suzie was upset knowing how difficult this visit must be for them - if only she could talk to them, and tell them how much she loved them and how much just seeing them again meant to her.

Her parents updated her with news from the relatives, the bad storms they had had so far, and how it was expected to be a severe winter. They had not been to Arizona before and were amazed by the brilliant blue sky and temperate weather in December. Suzie knew many people would love to be in Arizona now and not knee deep snow or experiencing bitter ice storms, but she longed with all her heart to see the ranch and surrounding pines wearing their coat of winter white. It was strange to hear Christmas music but not to see snow falling outside the window.

After all the news had been broken and there were longer pauses between each parent's remarks, they gently said their farewells and promised to see Suzie as early as possible Christmas Day.

Opening the door to leave, they came face to face with Laquesha. In her hand she was holding a gift box decorated with a silver ribbon. "Will it be all right for me to give this to Suzie?" she appeared coy. "I can't see her tomorrow."

"Of course, you can." Suzie's mother replied, intrigued by the little visitor. Happily, Laquesha ran toward the bed as Suzie's parents stood in the doorway, fascinated by the little girl.

"Happy Christmas, Suzie," Laquesha burst out excitedly as she got close to the bed. "I

brought your gift today, 'cause I can't see you tomorrow." Then she seemed uncomfortable, as though she did not know what to do next.

"Let's open it for Suzie," her mother said as she joined Laquesha, and she glanced at her daughter. Lifting the package into view, she removed the bow and took off the paper. Carefully opening the box she pulled back an ample covering of tissue.

"Oh," she drew in a breath, "it's beautiful," she said to Laquesha. "Look!" she said turning to Suzie. As she withdrew her hand from the box, Suzie saw that she was holding a crystal horse. Sparkling in the light, it reflected a myriad of colors as it twisted and turned on the ribbon. Suzie was deeply moved. It was a very unusual tree ornament, and there was an instant connection with memories of the ranch and her father's horses. Most of all, though, she thought of her horse, Sophie, a beautiful dapple grey mare.

Suzie's mother complemented Laquesha on her choice of gift and told her she knew that Suzie loved it, although Suzie could not express her thanks herself. Laquesha wished everyone a happy Christmas and said that she had to hurry away because she was going to an ice show and her mother was waiting for her.

Suzie's parents once more said farewell and moved to the door with Laquesha in the lead, but then suddenly she turned and ran back to the bed, where she had left her coloring book. Glancing at Suzie she thought she saw her mouth move. She called to the others and they came over to her side. Watching Suzie, they all could see her lips move, and although her voice was very weak, they distinctly heard, "Thank you."

"Laquesha," Ellie's voice held an admonishing tone, "we're gonna be late if you don't come now. Oh, excuse me." she said, as she realized she was interrupting. "Mom, Suzie spoke." Laquesha was grinning broadly with excitement. "I gave her my gift and she said, 'Thank you.'"

"That's my girl!" Ellie said proudly as she looked down at Suzie. "I just knew you had it in you. Merry Christmas.

"Merry Christmas." she said again as she hugged Suzie's parents. "This is a good one for you," she told them, "and definitely the best for me." she said laughing, smiling and crying, all at once. "I can't wait to see the look on Dr. Simons face when you say 'Good Morning' to him. That will slow him down a step or two, for sure!"

As Ellie's hearty chuckle filled the room Suzie realized that she was going to miss her. Especially now that she knew she would not be in the hospital forever.

## Waited Too Long

*Susan Irvine*

And NOW,
    When I've got so much dust. . .
And dirt
            in my mouth that it feels like
a lizard
            or a knee
                or a desert
and NO LONGER
like a
wet pink  flowery
    interior  organ,
NOW you ask to see me smile.
    I cannot.

## Untitled
*Susan Irvine*

For some creepy reason
    Whenever I saw you walk—
When I knew you, 4 years ago—
    I heard "Tambourine Man" in my head
"Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song
    for me."

I'm not even sure that's how it goes
    But I still heard it—
If I knew you now, I'd admit that
    Ms. Cavazos seated me next to you
        On purpose
'Cause she knew I thought you were cute
'Cause I told her that
And I'd admit that I kept the pictures
    you drew
    For me, the one that said
"I'm a travel down your highway
    with my suitcase
    in my hand..."
A Bob Dylan quote, you said,
    A quote I found stupid and silly
And not at all cute, like I found you

I'd admit that you looked so cute
    Drawing those pictures that
I couldn't bear to throw them away
    Even though I'm not sure I'd even
Recognize you now

And so maybe it's a good thing
I don't know you now
Because I'd have a lot to admit.

## The Most Beautiful Woman in the World
*Susan Irvine*

If I were the only woman in the world
Then logically, I could be
    the most beautiful.
No one would have brighter eyes
    or softer thighs,
No one would look better from behind.
Every man would see me bathed in a light
Of utter feminine perfection,
Without my having to subscribe to society's
Standards of beautiful.
As it is now, I will stand in front of a
Mirror tonight, naked, in order to decide
What I'll eat tomorrow.,

## Renovating Bonnie
*Bonnie Kodrick*

Gripping the handles of my burden, I shuffled into the empty room. The floor groaned as it tried to support the heaviness of what I had brought with me. The rigid cases were closed tightly against incursion, but they had become scarred and slightly mangled from many failed attempts. Their corners were not as sharply defined as they once had been, but they persisted in their containment of my accumulations. Some of the contents had never

fit me well, but I had refused to release them even though they were too big or too small for me to fit into comfortably. Others, though forgotten, were folded onto the bottom, secure in the deepest recesses of the valises. Tucked along the sides, retaining the rest, were those articles which were closest to me. These assets made use of the spaces created by the inadequate wardrobe, allowing a deceptive view into the amplitude.

Continuing to hang onto my baggage, I examined the empty room. Cobwebs laced the four corners together, tying them to the nonfunctioning lights in the middle of the ceiling. The walls were papered with vacancy graffiti and obscure words. If I opened my eyes completely, I could begin to distinguish the words. The biddings were confusing and elusive, some spinning away into cracks before I could fully comprehend them. Others lingered to dance toward the ceiling, beckoning me to follow. Limited by the twists and turns, the words slipped back down the walls into the holes made by previous occupants.

The knock on the door startled me, for I was not expecting others to care where I was. There was no peephole, so I did not know what to expect. I stood stone still, deciding whether or not to open the door. Should I have wanted someone else to invade the empty room? Did I want the vacancy filled, or should I have stood in the solitary darkness with my baggage?

Finally, I flung the door wide, exposing the artisan to my room. A professional in a worn book-apron burrowed in, tools hanging from different angles. He had come to fix my ceiling. He said that he wanted to open it up and fix the lights. I resisted, for I had no desire to tackle such a time-consuming, exhaustive task. I had by now grown accustomed to the voids and limitations of my room, and feared the change. The pro insisted, telling me that I should not settle for this nugatory existing-place. If I would open the light into the room, I could fill the empty spaces around my baggage.

And so I allowed the remodeling because I was weary of dark, cobwebbed corners, and of squinting to focus on the words that seeped back into holes before I could understand them. I watched the expertise of the artisan as he began making chalk-lines along the boards—lines that ate into the bases of the comfortable old beams; marks to distinguish what must be disposed from what must be retained. His lines were sure, precise, and I listened to the sounds of the hammer as he punctuated the silence with a pounding rhythm that tore deeply into thoughts. The antiquated beams did not surrender peacefully—they splintered away in tiny pieces, ricocheting against the cobwebs and the nonsense graffiti on the confining walls. Many moaned with various gradations of acceptance and denial. Many refused to leave again. The hammerbar forced the ends away, surrendering all the old in order to expose the new.

One strut crashed down, revealing a small portion of the vastness above it. I could see a ray of light straining through the opening, beckoning into the darkness beyond the remaining beams. It throbbed with its need to expand, eating at the artisan's hammer with its desire to grow. He subjected the next support to the building hammer, striking blows from new angles. With increasing force and expanding knowledge of weakness, the artisan methodically destroyed each confining brace, allowing greater and greater illumination as the ceiling broke away. The light detailed the scrabble of the wall-words, obscuring many but keeping the letters for future rearrangement in neoteric notebooks.

I had moved farther and farther into the corner, hiding from the splinters and seeking to avoid the too-bright light, which made me squint in my darkness. I wondered if I should have allowed this destruction, if I should have peacefully surrendered the comforting obscurity of my confined space.

The artisan began to glance more frequently in my direction, wondering if the light had reached me or it my baggage was somehow obscuring my vision and keeping me in the shadows. He was beginning to grow weary, for the light was difficult to expose and I was resisting his attempts to aim the brilliance in my direction.

Surrendering, I opened my eyes to allow the light to penetrate. I began to move slowly toward my baggage. I stooped before the artisan to open the cases. He paused momentarily as I rummaged through the contents, throwing many toward the garbage shoot in order to make room for the rearrangement of the few that would continue to fit. I struggled to release the discards, for I had grown comfortable in using them to fill my baggage-spaces. These clung to me, wetting my eyes as they attempted to stay. But I persisted in my efforts, for I wanted the light the artisan offered, and I was weary of the weight of the baggage.

The bags lay open flat upon the floor, ready to receive the new. I could see the spaces plainly as the light penetrated the freshly lit room. I awaited eagerly as each wall began to dust itself free from the jumble and rearrange its nonsense into order. The cobwebs were being blown away by the freshness which was invading the corners, and I found that the old ceiling fixture had been a prop which I had hung to seal the ceiling from the lights above it.

The room began to host a barrage of choices. I could see my choices, but I was not going to hide any of them away in the recesses of my baggage. I was going to leave the ceiling open—I liked the light above it. I did not want to tuck the neoteric into the nothing spaces. I wanted all the choices. I wanted all the light. I wanted all of what the artisan could show me.

I wanted my education.

## Making a Point

*Nancy Lockhart (Alumni)*

Oh, how I hate exclamation points!
They're used too much
At junctures and joints.
People plop them in pairs and in threes,
Making worse
A most dreaded disease.
Like blessing twice
After only one sneeze.
Stop already with using these:

!!!

Please.

Don't people know
They destroy the device?
Once is fine
But never twice.
Putting icing on icing
Has gone too far.
Sometimes an exclamation point
Is just a cigar!

## Stopping By Woods On a Nasty Night (An attempt at a bad parody)

*Nancy Lockhart (Alumni)*

Whose woods these are, I do not know.
Nonetheless, I've got to go,
Firm in the knowledge that it's
too long a drive
To Texaco.

The first cramp struck at the podium
But I, having no supply of Imodium,
Never got to read my poem.
My only thought - - to make it home!

Among the sycamore and rhododendra
There could be no question as to my agenda.
High-heeling through the bog
Without Reeboks, I could not jog.

My little Mustang idled near
While I did pray no soul would peer,
Then gave my pantyhose a shake.
I think they landed in the lake.
Non-biodegradable. . .
A big mistake!

Ill-prepared to weather this caper. . .
My purse in the car,
I have no paper.
Leaves of Grass, how Whitmanesque!
This night of Frost, I did my best.

Stopping by woods is quite abysmal.
What I would not give for Pepto Bismol.
These woods are cold.
I need a mop. But I have urges I cannot hold
And miles to go before I stop.

And stops to make
So I can go.

## Lemon/Lime

*Alicia Matthews*

Lime
green splashing
yellow splashing
Lemon

## fantasyman '97
*Alicia Matthews*

a sight of perfection
the sweetest connection
that I could ever dream to be
a natural dream for me
all I ever looked for
and now I want more
I want a taste of honey
that won't sting like a bee
reaching out for it
want to find out if it's possible
feeling like a nit wit
on a mission that's impossible
if he's the one for me
How do I get from point A to B?

## asleep
*Alicia Matthews*

sleeping
fast asleep
visions dancing
fast away from reality
in a personal paradise
dreaming

## Sun/Son
*Alicia Matthews*

The sun rises in the dawn
the dawn of life,
to bring the brave new son
to his father's wife

Noon, the sun makes a stand
Hot, powerful, strong, the sun of midday
Nineteen, the son became a man
He began to work, and left his play

A new fresh object appeared in the sky,
one to reflect the light of day
then came new life with a cry
now a father he began to lead the way

and when the sun went west,
the horizon filled with blue, red, orange,
    and golden tiers
and when the son retired to rest
his family filled his time with golden years

So as the sun set
His wife, His children wept

## People Watcher
*Alicia Matthews*

Some in thigh high boots
and orange, red and yellow suits
others wear flowered tents
or spandex with leopard prints
with hats and feathers
wearing cat suits of leather
they've pierced this
and tattooed that
Some have outfits of fish net
they'll even wear sandals with sweats
They are
gambling, betting
laughing, yelling
screaming, fighting
biting, punching
I am
People watching

## At the palace
*Alicia Matthews*

Flashing lights
amazing sights
thumping
pounding
yelling
howling
Casino nights

## Visions of above
*Alicia Matthews*

Mother showed me a rainbow
her piece of heaven
her reason for living
I beheld no beauty from above
only a prism in the sky
all I could do was cry
Robin shook up a snow globe
the glitters, and the swirls
all the images in a whirl
I did not see an image to love
I could not find my way
be it night or be it day
then I saw a star, bright and high above
are you my guiding light
help me find my way through night

## Immorality
*David McCord*

There are many men
Who live in my name,
All of their and my
Initials are the same.

We have all been raised
With an iron hand,
But, together, we all,
Also, form a band.

And we all teach our own
From their birthday,
We have all been taught
In the same way.

We will defend our own
To any length.
It is in unity that
We find strength.

The birth of new blood
Is our rebirth.
The lives of our young
Is our net worth.

No McCord will ever
Forgotten be
We will all live
For eternity.

## You Are Perfect

*David McCord*

Everyone says you're
Too old for me.
A problem with your age,
I cannot see.

Everyone says our
Love was not lost,
But I have loved no one
More in the past.

Everyone says my
Actions are wrong.
I know they're right because
Our love is strong.

Everyone says our
Lives will be through.
This will only happen
If I leave you.

Every imperfection
People thought they saw
Appears to me as
A perfect flaw.

Through everyone's thoughts
I've learned to rely
On the love we've formed that
No one can deny.

## I drip with honesty
*Erin M. McGrath*

i have loved and felt it damage
i have walked alone
i have lost
i have felt the need to change
i have seen how others see me
i know my call in life is louder
    clearer
than yours
i feel it guide me
i know you won't understand
and
i don't need you to believe in me.
does my security bother you?
can you feel the life inside of you?
can you admit when you are beaten,
    or should i use
    more force?

## "perfect me"
*Erin M. McGrath*

faint reflection
in your window; my eyes
drained
of all expression.
see the tears of disappointment fall.
break the glass
slice me open
hang me to bleed
inside your head
    drain me
    enjoy me
    regret me
    destroy me

## Tales of Old and Young
*Sarah Nowak*

"Your Jesus Christ is just a myth,"
    a young man
once proclaimed to me.
This concept launched my feeble mind
toward new realities.

Could the "Good Book" be a metaphor?
Each man's life held there inside.
A parable to emphasize
man's ever steeper stride.

New Testament: the childish stage,
of stress and sex and war and rage.
Adolescence, comes then, along
With Christ's black and white
of what's right and wrong.

We hold these "truths" and face temptation
throughout our lives, at each new station.
The Synoptic Gospels within ourselves?
Reference books, stranded
    on mind's shelves.

Could this be our Matthew, Mark, Luke,
    and John?
the differing faces, all forming one.

Our mind-set grows stronger,
    with time that passed.
This new chapter, Revelations, at last.
Terror, mixed with peace and love.
And only a trust of what seems from above.
Just a thought I have been thinking:
I'm the Bible, metaphorically speaking.

## Ravinia

*Mary Fran Lund-Overcash (Alumni)*

Polychromatic coverlets
blanket a verdant lawn—
candelabrum in resplendent display
flicker beneath an indigo sky while
Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings"
wafts through a sultry night.
My love and I,
with wine and rich repast
breathe deeply the
heady bouquet.

## Remorse

*Mary Fran Lund-Overcash (Alumni)*

We sat quietly
that night
turning pages,
speaking of nothing
and everything,
the snippets of our talk
insignificant and
frivolous,
just prattle to
quell silent fears.
Unspoken between us
life's ebb and flow —
first parent and child,
the confidante and
comforter —
I touched your velvet
cheek just lightly
with my lips,
sliding out of
your embrace
with uncommon
haste —
with no inkling
that mourning weeds
would be my garb
before the morrow.

## Mississippi Memories

*Mary Fran Lund-Overcash (Alumni)*

My mother was a transplanted Mississippi belle who kept a genteel home and raised a Southern family in the heart of Lincoln land. In our central Illinois community heavily populated with Italian and Polish immigrants, that made me an anomaly. My mother's gentle drawl infused my speech, and I answered adults with a soft "yes, ma'am" and "no, sir" — a behavior that immediately set me apart from my rowdy friends whose parents allowed a slightly coarser "yeah" and "nope." Birthday parties required an immediate thank you note

for each and every gift, not just a verbal expression of appreciation, and I was never allowed to wear white shoes before Easter or after Labor Day — no matter how warm the weather. To do so was considered "tacky" or "just plain common," my mother's kiss of death. Chewing gum, I was frequently reminded, was reserved for the privacy of one's home, never to be smacked in public. Our home was the only one in town to proudly fly the Stars and Bars and Old Glory on the Fourth of July, and grammar school history classes about the Civil War were guaranteed to generate lessons on the real story of the War of Northern Aggression.

My friend's factory-worker dads came home in the middle of the afternoon, and supper was at 4:30 in the kitchen from Fiestaware and stainless steel on a vinyl, wipeclean tablecloth — or, God forbid, no cloth at all. Mealtimes were often raucous affairs with food passed family-style around a lively table where everyone, it seemed, talked at once. My friends gobbled their meals and then raced quickly away. In our home, though, dinner was an occasion every night. Daddy never arrived before 6:00 from his job as manager of the local radio station. By the time my friends were outside playing again, we were sedately seated in the dining room where the cloth-covered table was always set with china and Mother's sterling silver. Daddy served our plates from the head of the table, and no one left until everyone was finished eating. "It's only proper," my mother would say, "and shows respect."

Little wonder that I considered the South as much my home as the North or greeted my visits there with such anticipation. Each May on the last day of school, my silver-haired grandmother would arrive to take me home with her. As the favored first grandchild, this was my special privilege — to spend the days and weeks of summer vacation in the elegant red-brick Mississippi home of my maternal grandparents. Not until many years later did I realize that it was my mother who really got the prize — for three months she was relieved of the constant bickering and sibling rivalry that characterized my relationship with my sister! Children are oblivious to such things, though — all I knew was that for the entire summer I would be the center of my grandparents' attention in a world where I felt I fit in, where I belonged.

Greenwood, Mississippi, in the summers of my youth, was a sleepy Delta town on the banks of the Yazoo River. My grandparents settled there shortly after their marriage in 1919, and Granddaddy was a surgeon and Chief of Staff at the local hospital. He continued to practice medicine well into his sixth decade, and during my visits he often woke me to accompany him on his hospital rounds. Bedecked in my finest party dress, I would walk hand in hand with him down the corridors and through the wards, my patent leather shoes announcing our arrival in the early morning stillness. It never occurred to me that a young child did not belong there among the bedpans and emesis basins, although Mother always said it was "unsuitable." Nurses and patients alike greeted us warmly with calls of "doesn't your grandbaby look fine this morning, Dr. Otken" and "isn't she the picture of her mama," and Granddaddy strutted with pride.

Grandmama was president of the local Garden Club, and the yard of their stately home was a showcase of waxy magnolias, colorful azaleas, and roselike camellias. Massive live oaks dripped with Spanish moss, and hydrangea bushes with large, flowery clusters bordered one edge of the lawn. One of my tasks was to find rusty nails to spread around the base

of the bushes. When watered, the nails leak iron into the soil, keeping the blossoms an azure blue. A brick terrace with wrought iron furniture was my favorite spot in the back yard, and I often sat there to shell the butterbeans or blackeyed peas left at the back door by grateful patients. To this day the heady fragrance of ivory gardenias evokes memories of the cape jessamine bushes surrounding that terrace.

All of Grandmama's friends had granddaughters my age, and we formed a tight circle each summer. En masse we whiled away lazy afternoons swimming at The Club or having Coca-Cola parties after the latest Elvis Presley picture show. Grandmama loved Elvis — "No boy who loves his mother as much as Elvis does can be that bad," she said — and after all, he was a Mississippi boy. That alone was enough for her. She made sure that I saw his latest movie (which Mother thought was sure to send me to Hell) and had plenty of his long-playing records as well. The highway from my Illinois home to hers took us right past the gates of Graceland, and she would honk and wave her white-gloved hand as we drove by. "Some day we'll stop and just see if he's home," she always said, but we never did. None of my Illinois friends had grandmothers who loved Elvis.

The summers of my childhood were the days of Jim Crow, white-only drinking fountains, and poll taxes in the South. Old Sam, the gardener who tended Grandmama's prized flowerbeds, and Miss Mary, who cooked and cleaned and washed our dirty clothes, came through the back door and ate their meals in the kitchen. Granddaddy was the only doctor in town who accepted "colored" patients and was highly regarded by the black community. In the dog days of August, 1955, in my seventh year, I awoke one morning to the presence of National Guard soldiers outside my grandparent's home. The next day my father suddenly appeared and whisked me back to Illinois with no explanation except "it's time for you to come home." Only years later did I learn that one of Mississippi's most hideous racial killings had occurred in nearby Money at that time. Emmett Till, a fourteen year old Chicago boy, had allegedly whistled at a white woman. In retaliation he was brutally beaten, tied to a motor from a cotton gin, and dropped into the Yazoo River. When his horribly decomposed body was discovered three days later, Granddaddy was called by the elders of the black community to examine it at a local funeral parlor. He later testified at the trial of Emmett Till's murderers. From yellowed newspaper clippings I read my grandfather's testimony that he wasn't allowed to touch the body and that from a distance he couldn't tell if it was "black or white, fourteen or forty." Emmett Till's murderers, who had confessed to his kidnapping, were acquitted by a white jury, and Mother often said that her father never got over knowing that his testimony had inadvertently helped free the killers of a fourteen year old boy.

My Mississippi summers ended abruptly when I was sixteen as the South's racial unrest roared through Mississippi. In 1962, two students were killed in the riots at Ole Miss surrounding James Meredith's enrollment, and in '63 Medgar Evers was murdered in Jackson by one of Mother's high school classmates. During my last summer in Greenwood in 1964, the Memphis Commercial-Appeal was filled with stories each morning about the deaths of three civil-rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and my parents felt it was no longer safe for me to be there with aging grandparents.

A few years later I married, and my grandparents died. In the decades since, my adopted state and I have both cycled through many changes. Mississippi's black citizens won their long overdue right to vote, and in the state's finest hour just five years ago, a racially mixed jury finally convicted Byron De La Beckwith of Medgar Evers' murder. A New South has risen in the shadows of the Old, and Greenwood is no longer the sleepy Delta town of my childhood. It suits me now to work among bedpans and emesis basins, and now it's my turn to indulge the favored grandchild. The red-brick house still stands, though, and the hydrangeas are still azure blue — and if I listen quietly, I can still hear ice-cold Coca-cola glasses clinking and peals of girlish laughter above the refrains of "Love Me Tender."

## It Happened Tonight

*Matt Packard*

I could've been at the park, ten years old
Standing in the snow, shaking off the cold.
The sight of your face would've
    warmed me like the July sun.
Would've played freeze tag, Do-Si-Do
By the end of the day, I would know
For all my life you would be the one.

CHORUS
It could've happened in junior high.
It only takes a blink of an eye.
It could've happened in the old wild west.
It wouldn't mean any more, any less.
It could've happened too soon, too late.
Either way it was worth the wait.
It could've happened tomorrow,
But it happened tonight.

I've been waiting too long for this kiss
Had I known it would be like this
I wouldn't have wasted a second getting
    to you
I've been waiting to feel this love
To thank the heavens and stars above
For the wish that finally comes true.

CHORUS

I know somewhere, some day I would
Be this alive and feel this good.
Didn't know feeling good could feel
    this way.
I never dreamed it could feel this right
Can't believe we fell in love tonight
Don't know if I would've made it
    another day

CHORUS

I can't believe you're loving me tonight

## Special Occasion

*Matt Packard*

Wake up with the sunrise
That sun's so far away
But it's warm inside my house
There's something special about today
'Cause just about an hour from now
I'll be greeted with a kiss
Seems no different than another day
But it doesn't get better than this

CHORUS
I put on my hug me shirt
Pull some flowers from the dirt
Try to be all that I can be.
Make a card with all I want to say
Don't need no holiday
You're a special occasion to me.

It's like every day's my birthday
I get Christmas twice a week
I hope you'll be my Valentine
As I gently kiss your cheek
Every night has fireworks
Like it's the 4th of July
So if I bring a gift
You don't need to wonder why

CHORUS

(Bridge) Every day you give me
That sweetest day spark
So every day on my calendar is marked

CHORUS

## !

*Matt Packard*

Since we met, I can't forget
How you look so right.
With your hair, eyes, lips, legs
And that dress you wore last night
We talked about things like romance more
And philosophy less
The only thing I want between
my name and yours
Is apostrophe "s"

CHORUS
Sometimes I write about you,
and how you make me feel.
The problem is I don't know
if you think our love's for real.
I don't know how to give our love
the proper punctuation.
So tell me that you love me, exclamation.

I want to put some emphasis
On this storybook I'm writing
My momma told me (and I quote)
"Love should be exciting"
If this thing heads toward forever
I think that we should let it.
If our love's a question mark,
I think it's time to edit.

CHORUS
BRIDGE
I need to know
How this story goes
So on you, I must depend
Let's not use, no period
'Cause a period
Only means the end.
CHORUS
And I'll say I love you, too. Exclamation!

## Untitled

*Tammy Raynor*

Alva was always on the verge of something. Wearing a flophouse grin and cotton dresses, she lived her life with a gnawing and a craving. On this occasion a wayward widow towed her barefoot youngins in a pine wagon toward the old abandoned bordello. We leaned over fences, pews, and pies, and consorted.

No one knew for sure why they would have moved up there. That place was Satan's suitcase. Perhaps she just wanted to keep her babies warm that winter. Old Cope had offered it up, rent free 'til spring. Her young husband had died trying to make their old cottage fit to live in, and now the cramped shack whistled in the autumn wind and did little more than to keep the coons out. He'd been a good husband when he had a mind to be. But the bottle got the best of him in the end as he tumbled from the roof with a half pint in his pocket. After the funeral his grieving bride tossed her Bible over the river bank and left the holy ghost wading in the water.

Alva hadn't spend much time at home lately. Maybe it was just too painful. Most nights you could find her laying up with RubyNell Whitlock, the top heavy waitress at The Green Fly Café. It is Christian to mention, however, that Alva, the Alabama backslider, did manage to keep both her children and the jukebox down at Horace Borden's bar well fed.

It was just about dark when the woman and her needlings topped the red clay hill in front of a weathered sign that read "Buford's Annetta." For a second she paused, recalling the old stories of her childhood, then resumed her pace as the crooked cart weaved up the walkway behind her. The smell of dust was not as overwhelming as the thought of having to return past the fine fold of Hoyt County should she not find the courage to continue. As she entered the dim hallway she was satisfied the townsfolk would not get the chance to call her a coward. Wearily she unpacked what was necessary and left the rest in pokes and piles near the huge chiffarobe in the parlor.

The Annetta had once been beautiful it is said, having all the charm of a southern gentleman. Varicose velvet runners had lined the narrow corridors introducing great rooms meant for southern comforts. The intricate woodwork of the spiral staircase remained proud, determined to display the delicate design of distant decades. The old heartland hotel had seen hard times, as had the tired sawmill town below her. Its beauty was as short lived as that of its namesake.

Annetta had been the favored daughter of Buford VanDavant, Russellville's most prominent citizen at the turn of the century. He had fashioned this grand caravansary around a magnificent ballroom on the second floor in honor of his daughter's passion for dancing. In another lifetime Buford's Annetta had been the epitome of social sophistication, hosting the jubilations and sometimes secrets of early southern aristocrats. Its success was not to last however, as tales told how young Annetta had hanged herself from the rafters of the divine dance hall following a violent quarrel with her father over an unsuitable male caller. Eaten alive with the guilt of it all, Buford was to lie in state beneath his grand chandeliers shortly thereafter. The passion of the Victorian palace quickly vanished, and a thick sorrow seemed to seep from the hardwood floors. With no one willing or able to revive her vainglory, she lowered her standards to feed her habits. As her tenants became less regal, her reputation more regarded. Tragedies had gathered in a hospice

of discontent. Buford's Annetta had become a tawdry relic.

Old Cope was all that was left of the VanDavant bloodline, a fact that he was proud of when sober. With the steep hill becoming harder for the old man to climb, he was looking to lessen his burden. His pitiful occupants could at least keep the pipes from freezing, saving him the trouble of having to head out there more than he absolutely had to. Having known Alva all her life he was sure he could trust her to keep her small family contained to the first floor. Charity not being questioned, its benefactor had agreed to all conditions. Cope VanDavant would not be responsible if the young widow betrayed him and ventured beyond the main stairwell.

In the shadows of an evening, Alva moved about her new dwelling with a nesting spirit. At half past an hour of their arrival, mama had laid the country toddlers on a worn patchwork pallet on the floor. She readied the fire beside them with dried embers she had gathered from under the porch where Cope had indicated. Exhausted from her excursion, she turned the lock of the massive front door and hung the gathering of old keys upon a nail in the foyer. Alva returned to her babies, joining them in their need for peaceful slumber. She lay focused on a dark brown stain on the ceiling as she drifted. Her thoughts had been of newness and pardon.

Somewhere in the queer existence between moon and morning they were awakened. Alva sat straight up as the children set about their bother for shelter. She reassured them and rose to follow the heavy sounds.

The eerie noise of wood scraping together grew louder and quicker as she clung along the handrail and forced herself beyond the steps that led to the second floor and a logical explanation. A faint moan lingered in the distance. The fury beckoned toward the ballroom and she consented. The dull glass doorknob was icy to the touch as the oak door resisted. Alva, determined, lowered to one knee and peered inside the keyhole at the commotion. Her skin paled as her eye revealed three black caskets swaying from side to side in forbidden wrath, banging and scraping at the floor that buckled beneath them. The last coffin was that of an infant. The room was filled with the sickening sounds of a young girl weeping, and the chilling cry of a baby. Alva thought she heard a man's stern voice and the distinctive fire of gunshot. All at once the caskets rested and the door flung open.

Alva darted down the stairs grabbing her squalling babies from the pallet and slinging her meager belongings every which way in the process. The fire cackled and gagged as she bolted for the door. Her feet were sooted stumps by the time she stopped to breathe. She looked over her shoulder at the huge cloud of orange far behind her.

The old hotel burned to the ground that night, burying its dirty secrets in the ashes. Some say old Cope was even relieved at the news. With a pocket full of insurance money, he offered Alva, RubyNell, and the kids a lift in the back of his new pickup truck to the train station.

The story of Buford's Annetta came to an end, while a beginning was offered to a young widow named Alva, who wore a flophouse grin and cotton dresses and lived her life with a gnawing and a craving.

## A Night in Eden: Prologue

*Amy Riley*

"Twenty-three up!" The cook's voice boomed out across the restaurant, causing nearly everyone seated at the tables to look up. A few of them jumped or flinched slightly, before returning to their conversations or half-eaten plates of deep-fried heart attack fodder.

"Jesus Christ, Zeke," I said, loading my tray with table twenty-three's plates, "It's not my fault Vickie called in sick. I've got eight tables going right now, and they all look like they're camping. You'd think people would have better things to do at three in the morning than come in here and ruin my life. You know, you could always come out from behind there and walk a few tables for me when I get backed up."

"Excuse me, miss?" a voice from the coffee counter asked, timidly.

"I'll be with you in just a second, OK?" I snapped over my shoulder, still imploring Zeke. "Come on. If you just took the coffee counter, I could handle the rest."

"No way! I'm not gonna have truckers pinching my ass," Zeke laughed. "You'll be fine, Debbie. Just get this food out before it crawls away on its own."

"Excuse me," the coffee counter again.

"I'll be right back," I flashed by, on my way to twenty-three. When I got there, I found a tired, road-worn family of five sprawled around the battered red vinyl of their booth. The homely parents argued over a map spread out across the table while their three extremely well-fed children fought amongst themselves. I was greeted warmly.

"Well, it's about time! I've got three hungry kids here and a schedule to keep if we want to make it to Graceland by the time it opens. I hope they pay you well here because if this is the kind of service you give all your customers, you must not make much in tips," the father stately, smugly.

"It's alright, Glen. You can see she's busy."

"I wasn't talking to you, Dora," he said as he squinted at my name tag, "I was talking to Debbie. Now, look here, Debbie. . ."

"Listen, Glen," I sighed, "I'll give you the kid's meals for free and don't worry about the tip. The pleasure of serving you is payment enough for me. Give my regards to the King."

I was off to the coffee counter before Glen had a chance to reply. "Sorry about that," I apologized to the pale young man. "Are you ready to order?"

"Um, yeah. I'll just have some wheat toast and a cup of coffee," he mumbled, staring down at the advertisements on his paper place mat.

I lingered for a moment and considered asking him what was wrong but reconsidered when Zeke rang his stupid little bell.

"Sixteen up!"

"I'm coming. I'm coming." I said, approaching the service window. "Thanks for toning it down. Hey, I need a wheat toast for the counter.

I already got him his coffee, so can you give him the toast when it pops?"

"It would be my pleasure, princess."

"Thanks, Zeke. Don't hurt yourself," I grinned to him, on my way to table sixteen. As I approached the table, I passed by a party of nine women who had just arrived and cringed at their drunken giggles and squeals. The charming young lady at the head of this table was stylishly clothed in a tee-shirt that proclaimed, "I'm getting married tomorrow, but I'm getting drunk tonight!" Her head was adorned with a dainty little crown of plastic penises with a white veil hanging behind it. I privately thanked God and Will County for having the providence to bereave the Garden of Eden Family Restaurant of its liquor license the proceeding month.

Table sixteen was occupied by three guys and a girl, college students. They had asked for a booth that was out of the way so that they wouldn't be distracted from their studies, thus they ended up at sixteen, which was practically in the dumpster out back. They all stopped talking suddenly, as soon as they noticed me approaching.

"Here we go," I said as I arrived, waiting for them to move their books to make room for their plates. "OK, we've got a chicken sandwich. . ."

"Oh, that's me," replied the girl, motioning with her hand.

"And we've got two cheeseburgers. . ." I received a "Yeah, here," and one distracted nod.

"OK, so I guess that makes you the three egg breakfast." I distributed the final plate and remained at the table for a few seconds, looking at the students. They all stared up at me, none of them speaking or beginning to eat or even unrolling their silverware from the napkins.

"Is there anything else I can get you?" I asked in a completely non-frightening voice, though they all jumped at the broken silence.

"Oh, no, no, nothing, we're fine. Thanks," said the guy at the left hand inside position, speaking the first words I had heard out of him all night.

"OK, ketchup's on the table." As soon as I was far away enough, they all started whispering to each other, again. Why did I always end up having to take care of the freaks?

I was on my way back to take the bachelorettes' ordered at table twelve when I noticed that the three teenage boys previously seated at table five were nowhere to be seen.

"Hey, Zeke," I called, "Did you see three kids leave?" They hadn't paid their bill.

"Yeah. Just left."

"God damn it!" I yelled, running out the door just in time to hear a car door slam. I ran to their car as I heard it start and tried the door handle, but it was locked, so I leapt up on the hood of the car and stared into the windshield at the three little punks seated within. They looked back at me, terrified, as if I had grown an extra head.

"Come on, lady," the driver implored, as he opened the window just a fraction of an inch.

"$12.59 plus tip, or I'm not going anywhere."

"We don't have any money," yelled the passenger in the front seat through the driver's window.

They looked too scared to try to move the '95 Taurus they sat in. I figured it must be mommy or daddy's car, so I tried a new approach. I began to jump up and down on the hood, not causing dents, but making them think I was.

"Cut it out!" cried the driver.

"As soon as you get out, I stop."

The driver gravely looked at his friends and turned the key to shut off the engine.

"Give me the keys," I said, hand extended. When I received them, "Now, I can call your parents or I can call the cops. Which one is it gonna be?" I inquired as they stepped from the car.

"Can't we wash dishes or something?" one of the kids asked, fighting back tears.

"Nope. I've got better things to do than babysit you little punks all night," I told them as I escorted them back into the restaurant. I sat them down at the coffee counter and called Zeke out from the kitchen. As he stepped behind the counter, wiping his massive hands on his apron, the boys' eyes widened and they looked even more horrified as they observed the cook's six foot, three inch, 275 pound frame which was covered with a gallery of jailhouse tattoos.

"Runners, huh?" Zeke sniffed, looking the kids up and down. "Don't worry, Debbie. They're not going anywhere."

"Thanks. I've still got some tables to get to," I told him. "I'll deal with these guys as soon as I get a chance."

It had been a wonderful night thus far. At least I had two tables that weren't eating, just drinking coffee. Table nine was inhabited by a middle-aged couple who were too busy screaming at each other to swallow any of their coffee, so food was pretty much out of the question. I tip-toed over and slipped their check on the table as I passed by.

Table nineteen was just having coffee, too. The sole occupant of the table was apparently a businessman, still dressed in his Bigsby and Kruther's suit, even at this late hour. He kept staring at the door like he was waiting for someone really important to come through it any second. He seemed nervous, too, because he kept tapping his spoon on his saucer, and had already had five refills on his coffee in the thirty-five minutes he had been here.

"Warm it up?" I asked as stopped at the table. He nearly hit the ceiling.

"Oh, jeez, I'm sorry. Yeah, more coffee would be great."

"You know," I said, smiling, "there's nothing in the world that soothes frazzled nerves like a good eighteen, twenty cups of coffee."

"Ain't that the truth?" he replied and smiled back as I moved on, through the dining room.

I had another single diner who kept staring at the door, but this one looked like she expected the devil himself to come through it. As I neared her table, I could see that she hadn't touched the plate of fries that I had delivered at least forty minutes ago. I also noticed that she was sporting what looked like the beginning of a radiant black eye.

"Is everything OK?" I asked as I reached her table. "Is there something wrong with those fries?"

"No," she laughed, sadly, "Everything is definitely not OK, but the fries are fine. I guess I'm just not very hungry."

"Oh, well look," I told her, gently, "I'm not gonna charge you for food you don't want to eat. Don't worry about it." I dropped off a bill for the Diet Coke she was drinking and returned to the coffee counter.

Finally having a moment to breathe and slug down a vile cup of life-threateningly strong coffee, I leaned back against the coffee counter and surveyed the dining room. I wasn't mentally prepared to deal with the runners yet, so I just let them sit there and stew in their own juices for a while. The bachelorettes didn't seem like they were in any hurry, so I let them sit and giggle and annoy all of the other customers at adjacent tables. The rest of my tables seemed satisfied, and I began to wonder what brought these people to this restaurant at this time of night, where had they been before they got here, and where were they going when they left? All of these people had stories, whether they wanted to tell them or not. I imagined that many of their stories were inane, some probably obscene, some happy, some sad. I could only catch passages of these stories as I interrupted conversations to take orders or deliver food, or as I briefly eavesdropped on each table as I passed them in the dining room. It was like watching TV while a twelve-year-old with attention deficit disorder manned the remote control. If only I could have just seized control of the clicker and stopped on each channel long enough to find out what they had to say.

Author's note: This is the prologue to a framework story. I had The Canterbury Tales in mind when I began. I intend for this prologue to be followed by chapters telling each of the tables' stories.

Notes upon revision: I have lots of ideas for all of these characters seated at the tables, but none of them wanted to be written just yet. If they do eventually spring forth, I'll make sure to submit them for the *Wordeater*.

## Limits

*Rebecca Sailor*

Gouge my eyes
And I could forget about the dizziness of
    Painting and fashion designing
Mash my brain
So I can learn how to be happy and focus
    On the simple things like relearning
To tie my shoes, the beauty
    of anticipating applesauce
Scrape up my face
It would be a relief to never again wonder
    If I'd make a good actress or
    Public relations specialist.
I'll know where I don't belong, and while you're at it
Crush my ovaries
    So I can stop applying makeup,
    Searching for suitors. We'll settle this business
    about family and possible children
    and I'll throw myself into selfishness
    with no regrets, different duties
Cut out my tongue
    So I don't have to produce a
    Song or the lyrics of German, and Latin,
    Or all the other dead languages
    And places that call to me
Chop off my hands
    And my hunger
    To be a chef or a carpenter will cease gratefully
    Every time I look at the stumps

---

    Give me a husband from before we were equal
    And let him force me to bake bread and cookies,
    Let my worries be a possible punch in the face,
        dinner at five, crisp shirts, perfecting the blow-job.
    Limit my search for meaning within him

## Sonnet 2

*Rebecca Sailor*

A winter cloud takes your form above me
Your picture painted brings my face to smile
I remember how you used to hold me closely,
and devour that pleasant moment for a while.

The pleasure of your touch is much desired
As I proclaim my love in the naked air
I recall how your heart recently expired
From that love we had
    that only dreamers dare

I ball myself up like a newborn infant
And scream into my hands empty and cold
As the wind sings
    a haunting church-like chant
And sadness infects my body
    like the common cold

And I lie there in the showy grass till darkness
When the sky puts on her
    jet black evening dress

## Another Chapter in What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Ugly

*Rebecca Sailor*

Ruby was wearing bright blue overalls with white knees. The knees were white and thin from being on her knees cleaning toilets all day long. The Helmshire Inn had thirty rooms, and Ruby was in charge of all of them. Her overall pockets were stuffed with extra rags, travel size soaps and shampoos, and "Helmshire Inn Comment Cards." Her front pocket contained the bits of trash that would damage the vacuum cleaner, like staples, paper clips, and bottle tops, that poked her in the thigh when she bent down. She carried a sewing box with her, made into a little maid's kit. It contained bottles of disinfectant, Comet cleanser, window cleaner, and sponges that housed the collective germs of hotel inhabitants past and present.

Ruby liked working in a hotel; she liked how people just came and went. It didn't give them enough time to really see her flaws. After she cleaned everyone's rooms, she usually worked at the front desk. It was fun to take a hot shower, put on nice clothes, and surprise the guests with her transformation.

The Helmshire Inn was a very fancy hotel. You couldn't call it a bed and breakfast because everybody had their own bathroom and there were a few too many rooms. Also, in order to fit "bed and breakfast" regulations, the owner had to live there. It was a good thing for all of the employees at the Helmshire that the owner did not.

The hotel lobby was pink. A great chandelier hung down in the middle, with tiny pink bows tied around crystal cupids that hung from it. The ceiling extended so that the second floor was visible from the first. An elevator hid to the left behind, pink-colored doors, which matched the London-imported pink rose wallpaper that covered almost everything else. The carpeting rebelled by being a soft cream, really not rebelling but just complementing the majority rule of pink. Antique furniture with pink dried floral arrangements resting on top occupied the corners. A cream colored satin couch made itself available for the inevitable guest pictures taken at the end of the trip. The hotel was beautiful and intricate in a little girl's room sort of way.

Ruby had always wanted her own hotel. Ruby used her mind during cleaning to imagine all the great things she would be some day. She relished the fact that she was so low, because surely it would be a great story when she was rich in the future. Besides, she thought "I own this place more than the owner does. I know the intricacies. I'm the one who is here twelve hours a day—I'm the one who gets to really enjoy it." Ruby could continue a thought like this all day long, until she was whipped into a silent mental conversation with herself. She would move peacefully around people's rooms, gingerly stepping and dusting around their personal items, and all the while be involved in a grandiose soliloquy in her own head. "Most people on vacation can't wait to get back here, but I get to have this place all year long," she thought. "What is the definition of possession anyhow, I wonder, because I possess this place more than anyone. Actually, this place is mine, when you think of it." She carried on furiously to herself internally, debating philosophy and defining ownership and possession.

Linda Galaxy stood at the front desk, checking guests out. Linda should have been able to respond to Ruby's silent conversation because she claimed she could read minds. However, Ruby's internal rant probably only served

Ruby, like most of Linda's out loud ones did. Linda wore a bright blue sweater with a polyester blouse underneath. The polyester blouse protested its suffocation under the sweater by exposing a giant, ruffled, fluffy collar that was at least twenty years out of style. Bright yellow polyester pants complemented the outfit, snug in the bottom and loose in the calves. Crystals, power candles, and special stones were scattered throughout the office. Garfield posters and calendars adhered to the walls behind the front desk. Country music blared in the background.

Linda was witchy, tacky, and definitely NOT pink like the rest of the hotel. Had she been pink she would have been hot pink, fluorescent pink, or horrid-bridesmaid's dress pink. She was the third general manager in a year at the Helmshire. She had lasted the longest because the owner had been having health problems and could not come to the hotel to inspect things. Perhaps Linda had a hand in the health problems. She mysteriously spoke how people from her home town were afraid of her and thought she was a witch. There was speculation of a secret voodoo doll designed to keep the owner in Denver where she belonged. When she was in a bad moon, she'd accused Ruby of theft, general dishonesty, laziness, or looking for another job. Upon making these accusations, she would stare deeply into Ruby's eyes, trying to determine the degree of guilt. Linda would say, "Don't lie, because I can read minds. I ALWAYS find out." It was hard on Ruby, because she usually felt guilty even when she wasn't.

Ruby couldn't read minds, but she didn't think that was how it happened anyhow. Ruby had premonitions in her family, and she thought that was a little more how it worked. Once Ruby's Aunt JoAnne woke up from a dream about a friend she hadn't seen in months, scared to death. She looked at the clock and wrote it down. A week later, her friend called to say he was running out of a collapsing building during an earthquake in Mexico at that exact moment. Ruby's Aunt Susan had predicted several plane crashes in Chicago, and her Aunt Patty could see ghosts. Even Ruby's mom could see into the future a little bit—she predicted Ruby's little brother's sex by having a dream about angel fish swimming around in an aquarium with little penises attached to them.

Ruby believed in premonitions because she'd had them herself. When she dreamt about her boyfriend getting beat up, he'd stumbled in the door that night with a black eye and a split lip. Once she dreamt about her boyfriend with his nostrils eaten entirely away, all bloody with only that strip of a bone between the nose showing. It turned out that he'd been doing crystal meth again, so much that his nose was bleeding everywhere. Mostly she dreamt about her boyfriend in bed with a redhead girl or under-aged prostitute. Sometimes she dreamt that he was in bed with another man. Those were the dreams she tried to ignore because she knew they were true.

"Ruby! Ruby!" Linda yelled up from the first floor. "Ruby! Come down here!" Ruby went to the balcony railing and looked down to the first floor. Linda was looking upward, turning around in circles until she spotted the girl. She gave Ruby a look of disgust. "Keey-os is here again'!" Ruby let out a big sigh. "Linda, I don't know what to do about it. I can't help it if he follows me."

Ruby's cat, Chaos, followed her everywhere. When Ruby walked to work from six blocks away, she'd hear a rustle in the bushes to her right or left, and sooner or later the cat would

slip out and pace behind or in front of her. He never looked at her when he walked in with her, as if to say "I'm not walking with you, I'm on my way somewhere else," like a big sister or brother would look on the way to school with a younger sibling. He followed her to the grocery, to the college, and downtown when she walked to get a beer. She'd see him and yell "Chaos, go back!" But he would just hide in a bush until she started up again.There was nothing she could do.

He was black and white, with a comically placed patch on one side of his lip. It made him look like he had a Groucho Marx moustache. He was sleek except for soft, droopy skin that hung from his stomach. The loose skin gave him the appearance of being fat although more accurately he was just too small for his skin. The cat whined outside the window of room 101, pawing on the windows to be let in. He thump-thump-thumped his paws against the window, vibrating it and meowing. One of these days he was going to thump on that window when a guest was there, and Linda was going to call the humane society.

Ruby was done with her work for the day anyhow, every room clean and fresh with the right number of perfectly folded towels and clean sheets. Every pubic hair and urine drip had been accounted for, every footprint in the carpet eradicated, each condom stuck to the side of a trash can thrown away. Ruby put her maid kit into the closet, put the smelly infected rags into a plastic bag, and laid out the sponges to dry. In the bathroom, she scrubbed her hands and forearms with soap to kill the melting pot of germs so they would not invade her own home.

## Chapter 2

Chaos the cat and Ruby walked home together, the cat leading the way. She picked him up as they crossed the street, squeezing him a little too hard, to let him know she was pissed off. Ruby sometimes squeezed Chaos way too hard, and wished she could squeeze his brains out. When Ruby was irritated, Chaos took the brunt of her frustration. It was a fair trade, because Ruby usually took the punishment of her boyfriend's anger. Ruby felt horribly guilty when she squeezed the cat too hard, but sometimes she couldn't help it.

When they arrived home, there was no food for the cat, so she opened a can of tuna for him. Ruby pretended that he got the tuna because he was special, but it was really because she didn't have enough money to get anything else. She tried to get the cat to lick the tuna fish juice off her hands, but he was too busy devouring what she'd put in his bowl. She pinched his ear and shook it a little until he meowed. She wiped her hands on her dirty overalls, unbuckled the soiled clothes, and shucked them into the corner. Naked and freezing, she stepped into the tiny, moldy shower and washed the rest of the germs off her body.

When she got out of the shower, she wrapped herself in a worn pink towel with "Holiday Inn" printed on it. Ruby's towels were pink from being washed with the wrong colors in the wash. If Linda was hot pink, Ruby might have been that red sweater in the laundry. She tiptoed across the tile floor of the kitchen into the living room where her bed was. The floor was cold too, and dirt stuck to her moist feet. She sat on the edge of her bed, removed the towel, and wiped off her crusty, coated feet before bundling them under the covers.

She wrapped herself in the fluffy blankets, trying to get warm, mildly irritated with the crumbs and dirt that had made it under the covers on other occasions. The cat finished his tuna

fish and whined to be let outside. Ruby tried to ignore it. The cat continued to whine as if he were being tortured, and finally came into the bedroom to project his voice more effectively. "Shut UP!" Ruby yelled. The cat jumped up on the dresser and slowly began to knock off little knick-knacks. He would paw an earring until it dropped over the edge of the dresser, making a small irritating noise. Then he leaned way over to see where it went, as if he were entirely innocent of the action. Next, he chose a tiny carved Budda, pushing it off the dresser, hearing a thud, and looking way over again. While he was preparing to catapult a quarter to its death, Ruby jumped out of bed in fury.

Chaos was prepared and leapt off the dresser toward the kitchen door. He wasn't fast enough, so Ruby grabbed him up and squeezed him HARD. He mewled and squirmed as she opened the door and threw him out and down the stairs. She threw him too hard this time...she could have really hurt him. The cat just hissed, sprang up and ran off. She fled back to her bed, ashamed. Frustration, rage and guilt drove her to maniac tears and depression-intoxicated sleep.

[To the reader: Can you think of a better name for this book? It is going to be a novel, based on my personal feeling that instead of "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger", what doesn't kill you makes you a more miserable, wretched, awful person, and that the only way you can find true happiness is to LIE TO YOURSELF ABOUT REALITY. Part of the point of the book is that 1) suffering is not good, not fair, and not character-building. 2) that hard work is stupid and motivated by guilt, low self-esteem, and faulty American propaganda that hard work gets you ahead. 3) about how abused women are some of the most selfish, abusive, pathetic and controlling people on the planet and get tons of sympathy while abusive men get none. These two chapters might either be a flashback, an introduction to, or subsequent chapters. ("Hammerhead" is a chapter in this novel too, except I've changed JoAnne's name to Ruby.) I'd like the title to be "What Doesn't Kill You Makes You (something)" because I like the sound of it. But, I'm not sure if the word "Ugly" fits there perfectly. Feel free to give me suggestions.]

## Coney Island

*Susan Sink (Faculty)*

You, sister, were the only one
willing to ride with me
on the ferris wheel
unlike any other—
cars circling
an inside track,
tipping up, sliding back,
as the wide wheel, haltingly,

turned us around.

## The Only Epiphany

*Susan Sink (Faculty)*

It's the only epiphany, first and last heart-break.
You grieve and let go, or the knowledge kills you.

You knew this child as one thing but she was more
Than one thing, she just didn't reveal it all, and chose

Not the thing you knew, not the child-thing you loved,
But something else you could never know

Lay in the dark heart inside her. She chose
That something else to grow into and away.

She is right when she says "I was always like this,"
And you are right to say, "No, you were someone else."

You are right to say, "I knew you back then, not like this,"
And she is right to say, "I know, but I was this then too."

## After The Entry of Christ into Chicago in 1976 by Roger Brown

*Susan Sink (Faculty)*

In 1976 Christ entered Chicago
on a flatbed truck. People lined the street,
joined in a paper doll row, and many more
occupied offices, one to each yellow pane
of Prudential, Hancock, Sears. The bridge was raised
over the river, but no matter, because Christ crossed
farther west and made his way to the platform
where the Cardinal, two country western singers,
and a committee of politicians awaited him.

Those who were dancing, continued to dance.
Those who were eating, raised forks to their mouths.
Those who were working, continued as always with here and there
one or two pressing faces against windows—
though for the sunset alone, the city itself,
or with some shiver of Christ's entrance
on their minds, we don't know.

By 1978, Christ had made his way to the outskirts of Chicago,
moving south, unaffiliated with cardinals or congressmen
or a particular style of music. Word of his work,
even some miracles, healings, localized prophecy,
did not make the papers. The sun set that day
and though nothing had changed, everything had changed.

Christ entered the town of Park Forest through the telephone wires.

Those in school passed their papers forward, entered "here"
or "present" in the ledger. Those fathers on trains
pulled into I.C. stations in the city, less than an hour by express.
Here and there a television set caught his entry; a man nailing siding
to a garage inexplicably stirred. A mother in her sickbed and empty,
dialed the number at the bottom of the television screen, and it was a woman's voice
that answered and with welcome, hard invitations, opened an invisible door.

## Eldorados are So Declasse (Parody of R.L. Stevenson's "Eldorado")

*Ted M. Thompson (Faculty)*

Gaily beclad
A gallant lad
In need to please the ladies
Worked under the lash
And saved his cash
To buy a new Mercedes.

But he grew old,
This lad so bold,
And never pleased the ladies,
For he never had
Enough of a wad
To buy a new Mercedes

As dreams did fade
He met a maid
Who wanted to be a lady.
"Girlie," said he,
"Why must it be,
This need for a new Mercedes?"

"Over the mountains
Of the Moon
Are the only willing ladies
Who'll ride, boldly ride,"
The maid replied,
"If you don't have a Mercedes."

## Stage Death (Apologies to Emily Dickinson) Parody of E.D.'s "I heard a fly buzz/when I died"

*Ted M. Thompson (Faculty)*

I heard an ass bray when I sang—
The noise within the room
Was like fingernails on blackboards
Or jackhammers in tombs.

The mouths around were all aghast—
The knees were cocked to run,
If this atonal travesty
Continued to go on.

I willed my voice to sing away,
Though song it scarcely be,
Unflappable until there were
Bright missiles on the fly.

With green and amber whiz and buzz
The bottles flew at me—
One struck upon my cranium—
I could not see to see.

## Baseball Caps

*Ted M. Thompson (Faculty)*

Are they vended
From some restroom machine?

These mental condoms,
Worn everywhere

Solely for the prevention
Of seeming odd,

Proclaim the mass minds
Sheathed therein

To be in bondage
To the consumer culture.

Paying dearly for the privilege
Of being used,

These logo exhibitionists
Curve so carefully

Their bills
Into the common cool.

## The Horror of Philosophy

*Ted M. Thompson (Faculty)*

In Plato's deepest cave
Did anything exist

For the shackled there
That wasn't shadow?

What was the shadow
Of a shadow?

Could they know of shadows?
And what was the shadow of love?

Did love only exist
In sunlight?

But in the dark?
No sweet distortions of a smile?

And no corrupted touch?
Only nothing?

Or the empty arms
Of the ideal?

## A Nest of Shadows

*Ted M. Thompson (Faculty)*

Overhead the hawk hovered
Between the sun and me.

I stepped in his angel shadow
But only put on his darkness.

That's the way it is,
Walking in another's shadow.

Preferring baseball caps
And communal shade,

We find bare heads and
Open skies anachronistic.

The comfortable shadows beckon.
The hawk flies on—alone.

## INSIDE WITH MR. RODIN

*Bill Yarrow (Faculty)*

His beard is like a forest
which he shepherds with thin fingers.
It is the searing beard of an old man
alone with his hands.
He is quiet like a museum
or God's frost. He has the
thousand eyes of a silent bee
and he calls them each a name.
The Helmet Maker's Wife or
Bacchus in the Vat. Adam and
Eve. Balzac. Pope Benedict
the Fifteenth. Head of St. John
the Baptist on a Platter.
He christens them The Hand
of God. He christens them Hand
of the Devil Holding Woman.
Six eyes are Burghers of Calais.
An infant eye is Kneeling
Fauness. He names one Headless
Woman Bending Over. He calls them
The Man with the Broken
Nose, The Crying Girl, Youth
Triumphant, Hanako. He calls them:
Pulitzer, Shaw, Mahler, Clemenceau!
Victor Hugo. Alphonse Legros. Pierre
Puvis de Chavannes. The names sing
to him in the stillness. Medea.
Ecclesiastes. Death of Adonis.
Minotaur. Project for a Monument
to Claude Lorrain. His eyes grow
like sunlight.
The eye called The Secret.
The eye called Minerva.
The eye called Colossal Head of Balzac.
He has many eyes as fingers of his beard,
index fingers like icicles,
blood like warm green bronze.
I listen for his silence and hear
what only he can envision—
the footsteps of the fingering cold.

## THESE ARE VIOLET RIVERS

*Bill Yarrow (Faculty)*

the air is a fierce tangerine tonight;
my sympathy sails out to snails and dead grass.

a thin wind in choir with civilization
is at odds with crickets and owls.

the birds make long sounds.
one eyelash hangs on the night.

heavy in the monarchy of morning,
an ancient wind warms a singed leaf.

## SOMETHING MAX BECKMANN SAID 1

*Bill Yarrow (Faculty)*

Unutterable things! Unutterable things!

The tighter I keep my mouth. . .
The stronger my determination. . .
To grasp! To capture!

To capture the emotion
Burning. . .

To grasp—the unutterable
(the terrible thrilling monster of life's vitality!)
things of this world. . .

The harder I. . .
The harder I try. . .
The harder I try to capture. . .

The deeper and more profound
The emotion about our existence
Burning, burning. . .

1 "The stronger my determination grows to grasp the unutterable things of this world, the deeper and more profound the emotion burning inside me about our existence, the tighter I keep my mouth shut and the harder I try to capture the terrible thrilling monster of life's vitality."

## Dali's Last Time

*John Stobart (Faculty)*

Will forever never be
Time enough
For you or me?
Day by Day Dreams
Never ending

Night by Night Mares
Ever blending
Twilight lasers
Neon chasers
Arcing high into our sky
Racing with infinity
Talking sweet senility

i retire

(And so ends the saga of John Stobart's 106 issues of Wordeater. May Bill Yarrow, "il miglior fabro," as Eliot said of Pound, raise the standard ever higher.)

## Wordeater 106 Student Jury:

*Jeff Adams*
*Nicolle Byrnside*
*Jeff Hicks*
*Nancy Lockhart*
*Francine Tolf*

## Awards

### Prose ($5.00)

*Ken Biggs*
*Susan Irvine*
*Alicia Matthews*
*Matt Packard*
*Rebecca Sailor*

### Poetry ($5.00)

*Sally Biggs*
*Margaret Howells*
*Bonnie Kodrick*
*Amy Riley*
*Rebecca Sailor*

### Cover Design ($20.00)

*Michael Fletcher*

**John Stobart is solely responsible for the awards.**
**Manuscript and cover designs must be submitted to:**
**Bill Yarrow, Room C-1069**

**by**

**October 19, 1999 - Wordeater 107**
**November 17, 1999 - Wordeater 108**

**Cover Designs submitted must be one inch margins all around.**
**Emphasize lines. Use india ink.**

*This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students are eligible for awards. Awards are not made to "anonymous" or pen name writers. Sign each page submitted and include your student identification number.*